

St. James German Evangelical Lutheran Church  
1401-05 8th Avenue  
Fourth Ward Neighborhood  
Altoona  
Blair County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5860

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PA,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. JAMES GERMAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Location: 1401-1405 8th Avenue

Date of Erection: 1889-90

Builder: Anton Meyer

Description: This red brick church building is the second on this site, built by the congregation when it outgrew its original frame structure. Although this church on a corner lot is a side-steeple form with the gable end of the long roof ridge facing front, the main entrance door is placed in the center of the front facade rather than in the tower section at left. At right a pavilion ending in a gabled wall projects to the side, balancing the visual weight of the vertical tower.

Trim of both brick and stone provides rows of horizontal banding across the front facade, in addition to related banding on round and pointed-arch windows surrounds. These are picked out in white paint. On each side facade, two tiers of windows and ornamental buttressing are complemented by triangular dormer windows above. Pointed-arch, stained-glass windows on front and sides show floral-inspired geometric patterns. There is brick relief-work ornamentation in the peak of the front gable, and gable edges and roof ridges are decorated in copper trim.

The former 60' steeple was removed in 1958 due to damage from several lightning strikes; the tower currently ends in a flattened hip and a large mounted cross.

Inside, as in many of the older Altoona churches, the sanctuary is on the second floor. An elaborate wood ceiling has grouped stickwork panels separated by heavy beams and visually joined to the side walls by carved brackets. An elaborately carved lectern in the shape of a life-sized angel and a Gothic tracery pulpit are also of note.

History: St. James is one of the historically German churches to remain active in the Fourth Ward neighborhood. The second Lutheran church in Altoona, started in 1860 and officially organized in 1861, St. James was formed to provide German-language services to families on the city's East Side. Two detailed histories of the church are available, published respectively for the seventy-fifth and 100th anniversaries of its formation. In the first of these, printed in 1936, an English text parallels the German version; by 1961, English is used exclusively.

The first church building, a frame structure, was dedicated in 1862 and rebuilt in 1873. By 1883 the church had 140 member families for a total of 475. At this time, alternating English- and German-language services were held. The new brick structure was begun in 1889, built in response to the continual growth of the congregation. The contractor was Anton Meyer of Hollidaysburg, who may also have functioned as architect. Dedication services were held September 14, 1890. By 1895 there were 600 members, and the church was reported to have a seating capacity of 750. German services were discontinued in January 1956.

St. James has sponsored a parochial school at various times, as well as several auxiliary societies and choirs. A current group called the Jolly St. Jamers, composed of older congregation members, continues ties to Altoona's German heritage. In 1981, St. James's congregation made the news when it donated the church's old pipe organ to Trinity Lutheran Church at Whitehouse in Canada's Yukon Territory.

Sources: Maps: 1882, 1888, 1894, 1909. Africa, 171-175. *Illustrated Altoona*, 85. "75th Anniversary of St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1861-1936." "100th Anniversary of St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1891-1961." *Altoona Mirror* (July 1, 1958; August 18, 1973; and September 1, 1981). *Altoona Tribune* (January 15, 1916).

Project Information: This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record

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(HABS/HAER), Rohert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), Randy Cooley, director. Overviews of the history of the city (HABS No. PA-5784) and the fourth ward neighborhood (HABS No. PA-5786) provide context for these buildings as well as a comprehensive list of sources. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in the city and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Susan Garfinkel in the summer of 1989 under the supervision of HABS senior historian Alison K. Hoagland and Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian. Garfinkel's and other project historians' work was published as Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1990), edited by Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

ADDENDUM TO  
ST. JAMES GERMAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
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